

By now families from coast to coast are hopefully home safe from holiday travels, occupied only with the anticipation of the New Year. And, by now, mercifully, the 111th "lame duck" Congress is finally history. Or is it?

In the days following November 2, it has been hard to escape the shadows of one of the longest and arguably most controversial congressional finales in American history. Before you accuse me of hyperbole, I'd like to point out that many South Alabamians phoned my offices in the weeks after Thanksgiving wanting to know when the liberal congressional craziness would end.

Some folks, perhaps confused over the recent changes in the Alabama legislature and the fact that new state lawmakers have already been sworn in down in Montgomery, are asking, where is the Republican U.S. House? Many callers have demanded Republicans assert their newly-won majority and take back the speaker's gavel.

I must point out that the 20th Amendment to the Constitution states that Congressional terms do not expire until January 3 of the year after an election. So, technically, Speaker Pelosi still holds the reins of power into the first work day of 2011.

Other callers want to know why there is no limitation on a defeated (lame duck) Congress? Actually there is.

According to scholars, the necessity of putting a stop to defeated and out of favor politicians was indeed part of the motivation for the ratification of the 20th Amendment back in 1933.

Before that time, terms for both the president and Congress did not expire until an amazingly distant March 4.

For reasons of practicality and to curb the potential for outgoing lawmakers to make mischief, the 20th Amendment rolled back congressional terms of office by approximately two months. Yet, its backers could not predict that their best efforts would eventually fall short.

As The Washington Post recently pointed out, both Republican and Democrat lame duck congresses have overstayed their welcome over the years since the 20th Amendment was ratified. The newspaper story suggested that perhaps the biggest shortcoming of the framers of the amendment was failing to anticipate advances in travel that would make it easy for lawmakers to return to Washington in between Thanksgiving and the New Year.

Further confusing the public is the fact that the swearing in date of the new 112th Congress is not January 3, but instead falls on January 5. While some might like the idea of nearly two whole days without a Congress, as we've seen with the never ending 111th Congress, there is no guarantee. In fact, the president could call lawmakers back for a special session during those two days, if needed.

We are all hopeful this will not be necessary.

New Congress this Week:

This week House Speaker-designate John Boehner of Ohio and House Majority Leader-designate Eric Cantor of Virginia will finally assume their new leadership roles in the U.S. House of Representatives.

I have had the pleasure of serving alongside both of these gentlemen and know them to be dedicated to the same principles of hard work and fairness that we share in South Alabama.

Born to a family of 12 children, John Boehner was the first of his siblings to attend college. He helped to pay his way by working nights as a janitor.

He worked in a small business before turning an eye toward public service in southwest Ohio.

After winning a seat in Congress in 1990, John Boehner immediately made a name for himself in Washington as a reformer.

A member of the congressional "Gang of Seven", he stood up to the House establishment by

highlighting lawmaker financial scandals and eliminating waste in Congress. He helped author the 1994 Republican Contract with America, which required Congress to live under the same rules and regulations as the rest of the nation.

As House GOP Conference Chairman in the 104th and 105th Congresses, John was a powerful voice in the fight to force Washington to stick to the strict spending limits in the Balanced Budget Act.

Eric Cantor, also a former small businessman, came to Congress from his home in Richmond, Virginia bringing with him a strong conservative agenda. Dubbed a member of the "Young Guns of the House" for his passion to restore family values and conservative principles to Congress, he was soon named Minority Whip.

This week he becomes the second most powerful Republican in the U.S. House.

We also welcome three new Members of Congress from Alabama who are to be sworn in this week: Rep-elect Mo Brooks of Huntsville, Rep-elect Martha Roby of Montgomery and Rep-elect Terri Sewell of Birmingham.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.